

London. Society for Constitutional Information
At a MEETING of the Society for CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION held at Holyland's Coffee-house on Friday, January 24th, 1783.

Resolved,

THAT the following LETTER, proposing Questions respecting the Borough Representation, be printed, and sent to the members and correspondents of this Society.

S I R,

At some late meetings of the Society for Constitutional Information it appeared to be the general sense of the members present, that great advantage might be derived to the public, at this important crisis, from a collection of well authenticated facts respecting the boroughs of this kingdom.

The evils arising from the present state of the representation are severely felt, and the necessity of correcting them, by recurring to the first principles of the constitution, very generally acknowledged. It may not therefore be necessary to descend to particulars, in order to evince the propriety of a reform. But as it is reasonable in a state wherein a certain portion of political liberty is the birth-right of every subject, that the specific plan of reformation hereafter to be adopted, should approve itself to the general sense of the country, it is presumed, that it would be of service to submit to the public eye the most accurate

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rate and authentic state of the present representation that can be procured, in order that the community may be possessed of the means of judging for themselves, with respect to the most effectual mode of rendering the votes of the Commons' House of Parliament the just expressions of the voice and wishes of the people.

With a view of procuring the proper materials for such information it was proposed, that our absent members and country correspondents should be requested to supply the Society with answers to the following queries respecting such boroughs as may lie within the limits of their enquiries :

1. What is the present number of the electors ?
2. What is the present number of resident electors ?
3. What is the number of houses ?
4. What diminution of voters has taken place in consequence of the late act respecting revenue officers ?
5. Under what tenure or by what means is the privilege of being an elector required ?
6. What are the corrupt usages respecting elections that have been prevalent in the borough, and to what extent have they been carried ?
7. Miscellaneous observations.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS YATES, Sec.

London, N^o 2, New Inn,

1783.

At

*At a Meeting of the Society for CONSTITUTIONAL
INFORMATION held at Holyland's Coffee-house
on Friday the 18th Day of April 1783.*

Resolved,

THAT the state of representation in the following boroughs, already communicated to the Society by different members and correspondents, in consequence of the circulation of the foregoing letter, be entered in the books of this Society, and published in the News-papers.

KNARESBOROUGH, YORKSHIRE.

“ This borough has returned members to parliament ever since the first year of Queen Mary's reign: The right of election was then vested in eighty-four or eighty-eight burgage houses, the owners of which were entitled to vote. The elections continued free till about the year 1719, when two gentlemen striving against each other, in canvassing first began the practice of purchasing the burgage houses; by these means a majority of the votes were always in the possession of some particular family: the Duke of Devonshire is now and the family has for a long time been in possession of all the burgage houses except four. When an election comes on a number of men are sent from a distant part of the country, and a certain burgage house conveyed to each of them for the day. They are then told who

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“ they

“ they are to vote for, and the *cry goes round*.
 “ Some man is chaired as proxy for the absent
 “ member. The steward of the honour is the re-
 “ turning officer. There are no resident electors :
 “ the men who are sent for to vote are the duke’s
 “ tenants. They come, if there is occasion,
 “ from his estates in the East Riding, but ge-
 “ nerally they are those about Bolton Bridge,
 “ near Skipton, twenty miles from Knarefbo-
 “ rough, on the other side of the wild moun-
 “ tainous forest. The number of houses in
 “ Knarefborough I suppose is near 500. If the
 “ burgage tenures were taken away, I suppose
 “ there would be found 300 or 400 men who
 “ pay all manner of assessments ; and these are
 “ chiefly manufacturers, farmers, and shop-
 “ keepers. There has no diminution of votes
 “ taken place in consequence of the act respect-
 “ ing revenue officers. The principal land-
 “ owners are Sir Thomas Slingsby, Mr. Round-
 “ hill, the heirs of the late Mr. Rhodes of Rip-
 “ pon, and Sir John Coghill, besides a great
 “ many tradesmen, who have small estates in
 “ the borough. The circumstance of the mem-
 “ ber’s never appearing at the elections, but hav-
 “ ing some old pauper chaired by way of proxy,
 “ which I believe is the constant practice, is
 “ really insulting. It cannot be said however,
 “ that there is bribery and corruption, as the
 “ elections are managed almost without any
 “ visible expence whatever.”

HULL,

HULL, YORKSHIRE.

1. What is the present number of electors at Kingston upon Hull?

Nearly 1200: the greatest number known to have voted was 1180. Taking off 50 for revenue officers, there now remains 1150 voters for Hull.

2. What is the present number of resident electors?

Nearly 900, including mariners, who many of them do not reside in Hull—There are 300 voters who reside in other parts of England.

3. What is the number of houses?

In the town and suburbs the best account says nearly 3000.

4. What diminution of voters has taken place in consequence of the late act respecting revenue officers?

About fifty.

5. Under what tenure, or by what means is the privilege of being an elector acquired?

By apprenticeship with freemen, by patrimony, by purchase, and by gift of mayor and aldermen.

6. What are the corrupt usages respecting elections that have been prevalent in the borough, and to what extent have they been carried?

For upwards of thirty years the candidates have paid the poorer order of voters two guineas for each vote.—The number who took money was commonly two thirds of the voters.—So established is this species of corruption, that the voters regard it as a sort of birth-right. Very few of the voters are independent

dependent of the higher ranks of people in the town.—The candidates have each their friends amongst the higher ranks, who canvass the town, and apply with great emphasis to their respective dependants, so that several tradesmen are totally at a loss how to conduct themselves with safety. (They are between Scylla and Charybdis.) And some have been known to *pit* the number of their employers on the side of the two candidates, and hand about the list as their justification. Other tradesmen, having more than one voter in their families, split their votes, for the sake of peace and the preservation of their friends in trade.—Besides the above two guineas being paid for each vote, the out-voters have been paid one guinea for expences, if resident twenty miles or under from Hull, and two guineas for above twenty miles and under fifty miles—above fifty miles, as could be agreed—This is to be understood, if the voter gave a single vote for one candidate—if one vote for each candidate, then half a guinea, and one guinea from each. So soon as the candidates declare their intentions of offering themselves, and the canvass is begun, the needy voters offer themselves as assistants, or runners, as they are called; and if one candidate refuse to accept their generous services (for which they are paid five shillings *per* day) they threaten to go to his antagonist: so that 300 and upwards of these Swiss troops have been known to be engaged *to do nothing*, at five shillings *per* day each, several days before the

the poll was taken. Messengers sent to canvass the non-resident or out-voters, promise of places, coach-hire, horse-hire, chaise-hire, treats, &c. add to the enormity of the crimes above stated.

Another matter worthy of notice is, that Hull being a town and county of itself, the freeholders and inhabitants in it, and in its district (which comprehends a quadrant of about five or six miles radius) have had no opportunity of voting at any election for the county of York, or for the corporation itself, unless privileged as burghesses.

Not above fifty revenue officers are burghesses of Hull; but the government-candidates have usually had about 120 votes by the connections of the customs and excise, and from expectants.

Many of the voters are not householders, and many of the mariners have no fixed residence in Hull or elsewhere.

It appears that every election exceeds the preceding one in corruption.

The following account has been sent to the Society for Constitutional Information from CORNWALL.

At a Meeting of the Freeholders and Copyholders of the parishes in the north division of the hundred of East, in the county of Cornwall, held at South Pedderwyn, the 4th day of March 1783,

It was unanimously Resolved,

THAT as a majority of the freeholders of the said county cannot conveniently attend the meetings

meetings of the county, because the town where those meetings are generally held is at a very great distance from their respective residences, such meetings cannot be said to express the sentiments of the freeholders at large:

Resolved therefore, That the best mode of collecting the voice of the majority of the freeholders of the said county would be, by appointing meetings in certain towns within the respective hundreds and divisions of the said county.

Resolved, That triennial parliaments would be the surest means of restoring our excellent constitution to its primitive purity, and supporting in future the freedom of elections.

Resolved, That the multiplicity of small boroughs subjects the elective rights to venality, corruption, and the most glaring prostitution.

Resolved, That the rights of election should be extended, and the representatives of the people should speak at least the sentiments of the majority.

Resolved, That the petition of the freeholders and principal inhabitants of the county is intitled to the support of every individual freeholder and inhabitant of the north division of the hundred of East; and that it is the general opinion of this meeting, that every legal measure should be adopted to obtain a more equal and adequate representation within the county of Cornwall,

Signed by 50 Freeholders, and
10 Copyholders present.

In all 60

Names

Names of Boroughs.	N ^o of Voters.	R E M A R K S.	Under what Influence.
St. Ives,	150	<i>Scot and lot.</i> Quere, If there are more than 130? - - - - -	{ Mr. Praed, under control, puts in one member. Lord Buckinghamshire the other. Best bidder.—Lord Godolphin has for some time had the new corporation, and now has the old. He has a park with excellent venison in the neighbourhood.
Helfstone,	2	Old charter expiring, quere, if the new charter be good? There are but two legal aldermen. The two present electors pay only 18s. taxes - - - - -	{ Lord Falmouth, the recorder, who is lord of great part of the soil, has the principal interest. Not certain.
Tregony,	200	No manufactory, trade, or commerce. An inconsiderable village. The right is in the <i>potboilers</i> . Several parsons are aldermen - - - - -	
Truro,	25	Quere, If they have proceeded legally? Some of the most opulent inhabitants are not in the corporation. Two or three parsons here too - - - - -	{ Lord Falmouth, and Sir Francis Bassett. Disputed.

Names of Boroughs.	N ^o of Voters.	R E M A R K S.	Under what Influence.
St. Michael,	30 at least.	<i>The port-reeve, and lords of the manor, capable of being port-reeves, and the inhabitants paying scot and lot. Supports itself by elections - - - - -</i>	Lord Falmouth used to have one and Lord Mount Edgcumbe's estate the other, which Sir Francis Bassett has bought, and wishes now to have both.
Penryn,	150	<i>Scot and lot. A parson alderman and sometimes mayor - - - - -</i>	Lord Mount Edgcumbe and Sir Fra. Bassett. Disputed. The latter at present has the whole; but probably will not for the future.
Fowey,	63 at least.	<i>Prince's tenants, capable of being port-reeves, and the inhabitants paying scot and lot. - - - - -</i>	Lord Mount Edgcumbe and Mr. Rashleigh. Secure till a richer man comes.
Tintagel,	20	<i>Scot and lot. Reduced to one (Arthur Wade) by the revenue-officer bill; but will probably be filled up soon -</i>	Lord Mount Edgcumbe and Lady Bute. Not secure.

Names of Boroughs.	N ^o of Voters.	R E M A R K S.	Under what Influence.
Lestwithiel,	24	Seven aldermen, each of whom on a vacancy is elected by seventeen common-council-men, who are annually removable by the aldermen. About 400 inhabitants. A parson alderman - -	Lord Mount Edgcumbe. Secure.
St. Maws,	22 at least.	A fishing town. Much affected by the revenue-officer-bill, but probably now filled up. <i>Quere</i> , If they have proceeded according to custom? - -	
Bodmin,	36	<i>Aldermen and free-burgesses, limited to 36.</i> About 800 inhabitants - - -	Lord Nugent and Mr. Hugh Boscawen. Secure.
East Loo,	53	<i>Freemen unlimited</i> - - -	
West Loo,	100 at least.	<i>Freemen unlimited,</i> - - -	{ Mr. J. Buller, once lord of admiralty and afterwards of treasury. Secure. Mr. J. Buller, nephew of the former. Secure.

Names of Boroughs.	N ^o of Voters.	R E M A R K S.	Under what Influence.
Launceston,	20	Mayor, aldermen, and freemen that were inhabitants when made free - - -	Duke of Northumberland.
Newport,	24	- - - - -	Secure.
Leskeard,	50	Corporation and freemen unlimited. About 1000 inhabitants - - -	Ditto.
Grampound,	25	About 200 inhabitants - - -	Mr. Elliott. Secure.
St. Germain's,	20	About 250 inhabitants - - -	Mr. Elliott. Secure.
Callington,	50	Scot and lot, and burgage tenures. Quere, As to freeholders? About 400 inhabitants - - -	Mr. Elliott. Secure.
Camelford,	19	Mayor, chief burghesses, and freemen. No trade, manufactory, or commerce. Not above 300 inhabitants - - -	Lady Orford and the Duke of Bedford. Rev. Mr. Phillips. Secure for the present, but will probably be the Duke of Bedford's.

Names of Boroughs.	N ^o of Voters.	R E M A R K S.	Under what Influence.
Saltaſh,	28	<i>Corporation.</i> Of theſe not above 23 ever vote. Mr. Buller, however, petitions for burgage-tenure; of which deſcription there are 38 votes, which he has - - - - -	Admiralty or Miniſter. Secure, if the right be in the corporation.
21 Boroughs,	1111	Voters. But in general 800 do not vote, being out-livers or honorary freemen. So that nominally 800 chooſe 42 members, and 2700 2 for the county. In all 44	being out-livers or hono-

But the 42 former members ought in fact to be conſidered as returned, not by the 800 nominal voters, but by the twenty names in the right hand column. And then it would ſtand thus,

20 choſe 42 members for boroughs,	
2700 choſe 2 for the county.	
	<u>44</u>

BATH.

The number of electors at present are 28, being *the mayor and corporation*; there being at present but 18 common-council. Their full number is 20 common-councilmen and ten aldermen. Excepting two of the aldermen, Johnson Robinson and James Leake, who for some years past have resided in London, they all reside in Bath. The number of houses in Bath are very nearly 2700.

*Account of the boroughs of NEWPORT, NEWTOWN,
and YARMOUTH, in the ISLE OF WIGHT.*

NEWPORT

Contains about 500 houses, and between 2 and 3000 inhabitants: out of the most discreet and substantial of whom the charter directs, that the corporation, consisting of 12 *aldermen and 12 burgeses*, shall be chosen, in the following manner; viz. that, when a vacancy happens in the court of aldermen, one of the 12 burgeses be elected to succeed him; and that his place be filled by taking a new burges from among the inhabitants. In this *corporation*, consisting of 24 members, the right of electing the members of parliament for the town is vested. One, who was an officer in the customs, was disfranchised by a late act: and 17 only, *at most*, of the electors are resident.

It is said, that the mayor, a gentleman of considerable fortune in the island, has, with the assistance

assistance of the minister, very considerable influence in this borough.

The following is a list of the members of the corporation.

ALDERMEN 12.

1. The mayor.
2. The recorder. A master in Chancery; and commissioner of taxes, a place worth 500*l. per ann.*
3. An apothecary in the town; not on the best terms with the mayor.
4. An attorney. Brother-in-law to the mayor; but not at present on his side.
5. Brother to the mayor. A commissioner of the lottery.
6. Has a gunner's pay in one of the castles on the island.
7. A clergyman. Chaplain to the governor. A sinecure.
8. A mercer in Newport.
9. Has a gunner's pay.
10. The same.
11. Nephew to the mayor. Lieutenant and adjutant of the company of the Isle of Wight militia.
12. A brewer of the town.

BURGESSES 12.

1. A land-surveyor in the customs at Cowes.
2. A captain in the navy, married a niece of the recorder.
3. A relation of the mayor. Captain in the South Hants militia.

4. A

4. A carpenter.
5. An innkeeper in the town.
6. A taylor in ditto. Deputy-keeper, under the mayor, of the forest of Parkhurst in the island.
7. Late a schoolmaster in the town.
8. Has a gunner's pay.
9. Captain of the Isle of Wight militia.
10. An apothecary.
11. Son to the alderman, N^o 8.
12. Son-in-law to the mayor, and steward to the governor of the isle.

N. B. The aldermen, N^o 1, 2, 5, and 11, and the burgessees, N^o 1, 2, 3, 4, and 12, do not at present live in Newport, nor did they but for a few months previous to their several elections; when, by taking houses and paying to the rates, they made themselves inhabitants, such as the charter describes; viz. the most discreet and substantial.

NEWTOWN

Is a decayed place, containing only about 10 cottages, and of course very few inhabitants. The right of election is attached to 39 *borough lands, or burgage tenures*. One elector only resides in the place. The burgage tenures are in the following hands. The real owners convey them to their relations, friends, or dependants, for life; but in confidence to vote as directed by them. The number has been increased to 39 by splitting three; which are therefore conceived not to be good votes.

Sir

Sir Richard Worsley - - *	12	Of these 2 are split.
Sir Fitzwilliams Barrington	8	
Mr. Holmes - - - -	7	Of these 1 is split.
Sir Wm. Oglander and Ja.	3	3 split.
Worsley, Esq. as trustees		
for Wm. the son of Ed.		
Meux Worsley, Esq. dec.		
Sir Wm. Oglander - -	2	
John Urry, Esq. - -	2	
The coheirs of John Leigh,	1	
Esq. - - - - -		
Maurice Bissett, Esq. -	1	
Robert Pope Blackford, Esq.	1	
Wm. Hill, Esq. - - -	1	
Wm. Harvey, a husbandman	1	

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From whence we may see, that the number of actual voters is about 33. The revenue officers bill has taken off one vote only.

Sir Richard Worsley and Sir Fitzwilliams Barrington are at present united; and it is evident, that, with the assistance of Mr. Blackford, who is son-in-law to the latter, and any one other person, they have a decisive majority.

YARMOUTH

Contains about 50 houses, cottages included. The right of election is in *the capital and free*

* N. B. Two of these were sold by Lord Edgcumbe to Sir Rich. Worsley, in 1782, for 1000 guineas; tho' only two decayed cottages.

burgesses. The free burgesses are chosen from the capital burgesses, and are unlimited by the constitution of the borough ; but at present there are only nine.

Mr. Holmes and Mr. Jervois Clarke Jervois have each their friends and dependents as burgesses ; and by mutual compact have agreed, that each shall nominate one of the two members. The capital burgesses are equally divided between the two parties, as follows :

N^o 1. Mr. Holmes.

- 2. - - - - - His brother-in-law,
- 3. - - - - - His own brother.
- 4. - - - - - His brother-in-law.
- 5. - - - - - His son-in-law.
- 6. - - - - - The recorder of Newport.

N^o 7. Mr. Jervois.

- 8. - - - - - { A clergyman who has good
preferment by means of
Mr. Jervois's interest.
- 9. - - - - - { Mr. J——'s friends ;—live
10. - - - - - { in London.
- 11. - - - - - { D^o————— live
12. - - - - - { in or near Havant.

FREE BURGESSES.

- N^o 1. - - - - - { A near relation of Mr.
Holmes.
- 2. - - - - - A gentleman of Wiltshire.
- 3. - - - - - { Doubtful if living—Con-
- 4. - - - - - { nected with N^o 2.

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 5 . - - - - - | { Formerly a tenant to Lord Holmes. |
| 6. - - - - - | { D ^o ————— and now to |
| 7. - - - - - | { Mr. Holmes. |
| 8. - - - - - | { A barber and sloopfeller.
The only resident. |
| 9. - - - - - | { Collector of the salt-duties
in Cheshire, formerly in
the Isle of Wight. |

N. B. These free burgesſes are of old ſtanding, and will not be made capital. Formerly there were many (the number being unlimited) but in the year 1756, after a diſpute between Mr. Holmes and Mr. Jervois and the Leigh family of North Court in the iſland (of which Mr. Jervois's lady was a part) as it is ſaid and believed, a compromise took place, by which it was ſtipulated, that a great number of free burgesſes, then newly made, ſhould be diſfranchiſed; which was accordingly done: and that each party ſhould thenceforth name one member. And, to keep the intereſts even, whenever a capital burgeſs dies, the ſide to which he belonged immediately nominate another perſon to be a free burgeſs, and then make him capital—as the charter preſcribes.

From this ſtate of facts it plainly appears, that the four members of Newport and Yarmouth are returned by only two perſons: three by Mr. Holmes, *with the miniſter's aſſiſtance*, and one by Mr. Jervois. The members for Newtown are choſen at preſent by four perſons. — In all, fix

members by six electors only; and this small body may be farther diminished by a union of interests in the borough of Newtown between the Worsley Family and Mr. Holmes; in which case four men would return six persons to represent them in parliament.—If this unadorned recital does not impress on the mind the fullest conviction of the absolute necessity of some reform in the representation, it is surely fair to conclude, that the utmost power of reason and eloquence would be exerted in vain.

LANCASTER

Contains at this time about 1160 houses, and somewhere about 1600 families. At the last election 2800 voted, 700 of whom only live in Lancaster. By the charter *Freemen only* have a vote; but the most glaring corruption lies in *making* those freemen. A freeman's son, or a freeman's apprentice within the borough, is entitled to take up his freedom whenever he pleases, on paying into the hands of the mayor or bailiff 27s. 6d. This sum is most generally paid by the opposing candidates, and the greatest number of freemen thus made turn the scale of the election. Hence, as ship-building and the cabinet business are the only manufactories there, he who has most ships to build or repair, or he who will lay out a few hundreds in mahogany furniture, is most likely to carry his election. The journeymen are at the command of their masters; they get intoxicated during the

the canvas, and having 5s. to eat and drink on the day of election, they give a shout, and go quietly to work again. The revenue officers are about 25—but many of them are not freemen, and therefore had no votes.

COCKERMOUTH AND APPLEBY.

The first is a purchased borough, and the property of Sir James Lowther, he having purchased a majority of tenements, and sold them back to the original proprietors, only reserving the right of their votes; for which, it is said, he paid or should pay an enormous sum.—APPLEBY is in the same thralldom to the Earl of Thanet—Hogsties have been deemed freeholds there, and purchased by the Thanet and Lowther families at a price exceeding all belief!—The contention between these two families has given the borough its only consequence: it now sits down quietly to be represented by a hog or a horse, as its noble proprietor thinks proper.

THE CORPORATION OF BEVERLEY.

1. The present number of electors is about 1100.
2. The present number of resident electors is about 600.
3. The number of houses has not been accurately taken, but are nearly 800.
4. Only four freemen have lost their votes in consequence of the late act respecting revenue officers.

5. The

5. The privilege of being an elector is acquired by patrimony, servitude with freemen *in the town*, and purchase.
6. There are nearly 200 voters, who are said to be under what is called the *bar interest*, and generally abide pretty strictly by Mr. Pelham's interest.—In many respects Beverley is less unduly influenced than most boroughs.—The ill effects of canvassing are, however, growing conspicuous. The voters minds are set agog after feasting and its attendant follies. It has been said, that some of the burgeses take Half a Guinea or a Guinea of the candidates. This practice is only in its infancy.—In the years 1774 and 1780, 300 or 400 of the burgeses were exceedingly eager for an opposition, without attending to the political opinions of the candidates, which seems to indicate something very vague and unsubstantial in their ideas of freedom. They were afraid, it seems, that if the Bar Interest (or Mr. Pelham's) was not opposed, the loaves and fishes, as well as the liquor they swam in, might escape from their possession.

THE CORPORATION OF HEYDON,
YORKSHIRE.

1. The present number of electors is about 130.
Before the revenue act passed there were 170.
2. The present number of resident electors is 40.
3. The number of houses is 150.

4. For ty

4. Forty burgesſes have loſt their votes by the late revenue act.
5. The privilege of being an elector is acquired by patrimony, by ſervitude *in the town* with freemen, and by purchaſe.
6. This borough is as corrupt as corruption can make it.—Every burgeſs (with the exception of a few indeed) thinks it incumbent on him, to lay the candidates under as ſevere contribution as poſſible.—Riband bills will amount to £100—A journey to London will be £100—The candidates agents will lend the burgeſſes money, which is never returned—The families of ſeveral burgeſſes have almoſt lived by their exactions, and yet their idleneſs has ruined them—Voters have been known to aſk £100; and £80 has been bid for a ſingle vote—The nominal price of a vote is £20; *i. e.* £20 is expected by each voter, in caſe there is no oppoſition.—Where ſuch enormities prevail, inferior vices will neceſſarily flouriſh.



